Doctoral Exam in Social Stratification
Fall 2007

Friday 28 September 2007

1 Instructions
Answer a total of 4 questions among the following 6. If you have any question during the exam you may contact Francois Nielsen at francois_nielsen@unc.edu.

2 Questions

1. In a 2003 book (Firebaugh, Glen. 2003. The New Geography of Global Income Inequality. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) and in a 2004 article (Firebaugh, Glen and Brian Goesling. 2004. “Accounting for the Recent Decline in Global Income Inequality.” American Journal of Sociology 110: 283–312) Firebaugh and Goesling argue that global income inequality has stopped increasing and possibly begun declining. This question has two parts:
   (1) Give an outline of the major trends in global inequality (considering inequality within societies, between societies, and for the world as a whole) from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to today
   (2) Critically discuss competing theories of globalization and inequality that attempt to predict and explain more recent trends in global inequality (say, from the middle of the 20th Century to today)

   (1) What is the current evidence on intergenerational mobility? Is the U.S. more or less mobile than in the past? How does the U.S. compare with other advanced industrial countries?
   (2) What are the methodological and substantive differences between the regression based approach that looks at the correlation between parent’s and child’s income levels, and the traditional sociological approach that
looks at an intergenerational occupational mobility table? Can the two approaches be reconciled?

3. In the same article mentioned in the previous question (Neckerman, Kathryn M. and Florencia Torche. 2007. “Inequality: Causes and Consequences”, Annual Review of Sociology 33: 335–57, [http://soc.annualreviews.org] the authors write: “Contextual inequality is the same for everyone living in a given area, whereas relative deprivation depends on an individual's location within the income distribution and can be understood as an interaction between contextual inequality and individual position.” This is a general problem in the study of inequality. For what reasons might you rather be a relatively poor person in a rich place, or a relatively rich person in a poor place? Consider the pros and cons of both situations, and use relevant research findings to illuminate the problem.

4. (Trends in income inequality in the United States) Recent evidence (e.g., David H. Autor & Lawrence F. Katz & Melissa S. Kearney, 2005. [“Trends in U.S. Wage Inequality: Re-Assessing the Revisionists” NBER Working Papers 11627, [http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/580] shows that the trend of increasing inequality has changed since the end of the 1980s. While upper tail inequality has continued to grow (i.e. the 90:50 ratio has continued to go up), lower tail inequality (i.e., the 50:10 ratio) has stopped growing.

(1) Provide a critical review of the evidence on trends in inequality in the United States since 1970 and explain the possible causes of these trends, taking into account this recent evidence on lower- and upper-tail inequality.

5. In 1848 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published their Communist Manifesto, giving a central role to the concept of social class developed earlier by French socialist writers. Do the following:

(1) Outline the evolution of the notion of social class as used by social scientists from the time of Marx and Engels to today.

(2) Relate this evolution in the notion of social class to the social transformations that have taken place in industrial societies and the varying fortunes of Marxist-Leninist societies.

(3) Finally discuss briefly the question: Are there social classes in industrial societies today?

6. In 1859 Charles Darwin published On the Origin of Species, establishing the evolutionary perspective as the central understanding of all manifestations of life on earth. Citing relevant literature, discuss the way or ways in which the evolutionary perspective might be useful in understanding the evolution of stratification systems in human societies.